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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004110

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY'S OPPOSITION CHP STILL WALKING TIGHTROPE ON SUPPORT FOR EU REFORM

REF: A. ANKARA 3732

B. ANKARA 3974

(U) Classified by Political Counselor John Kunstadter.

Reason: 1.5 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: AK government says it will pursue as one or two additional EU reform packages (the seventh and eighth) before Parliament goes on delayed recess this summer. Opposition CHP supported the sixth package in June 20 vote, but is now attempting to put the breaks on the government's reform drive. CHP is in a bind: the party does not want to appear to be on the wrong side of pro-reform public opinion, but it also wants to reflect military-Turkish State equities -- and is loath to get too far ahead of the generals and other elements of the Establishment. End Summary.

Package in Sezer's Hands

¶2. (C) Parliament last week adopted the sixth EU reform package, which President Sezer now must either sign or send back to the legislature by 4 July. The package included most of what the ruling AK Party had originally proposed, minus some proposals that main opposition CHP had raised with us previously as redlines (ref A). Building on this momentum, AK has promised a seventh -- and possibly an eighth -- package of comprehensive reforms including legislation that would: 1) formally reduce the role of the military in politics (ref B); and 2) make sweeping but as yet unspecified constitutional changes, before Parliament goes on recess in August.

Baykal Speaks

¶3. (C) Partly in order to break AK's momentum, CHP ("the Party of Ataturk") is now expressing reservations about the need for further reform so quickly. In a June 24 press interview, CHP leader Baykal averred that his party will not support, at least for now, a seventh or eighth package of EU-related legislation. Baykal offered the following reasons:

-- There is no need for further changes to the constitution in order for Turkey to get a date to begin EU negotiations. "When Portugal began negotiating with the EU, there was still a clause in its constitution giving 'intervention authority' to the military." Moreover, "(German Chancellor) Schroeder and (French President) Chirac have already said it is all done," he said;

-- The government should now focus on implementation of existing reforms vice trying to push through more proposals;

-- CHP will not endorse amending the constitution unless the government first agrees to restrict parliamentary immunity, which has protected M.P.s from prosecution for corruption or other criminal charges.

Baykal Praises TGS

¶4. (C) In his June 24 speech before the CHP parliamentary group, Baykal led off with particularly strong praise for the military's ostensible support for reform, including the General Staff's recent decision to reduce length of obligatory military service for conscripts. Baykal expressed the timing of the decision as "perfect," and as "a decision that suits the Armed Forces." (Note: some mainstream press commentators suggest that the TGS made the move now in part

to undercut increasingly vocal calls for budgetary and other military-related reforms. The idea has been a pet project of TGS Chief Gen. Ozkok for years, however. The military began staff action on the issue as soon as Ozkok assumed office last year. End note.)

M.P.s Falling In

15. (C) In separate meetings June 25, CHP M.P.s Mehmet Yildirim and Engin Altay confirmed to poloff that while CHP wholeheartedly supports EU membership, the party will not back additional reform packages as they are currently envisioned.

-- Both objected to the government couching the reforms in EU terms only, and said that the government "should focus on those things that are good for the country, not just good for EU membership." Altay, member of the Human Rights Committee, explained that "Turkey should make these changes because it is good for the Turkish people, not because the EU wants Turkey to." (Note: PM Erdogan and AK say the same thing, even as they support rapid reform. End note.)

-- Echoing Baykal -- and each other -- the M.P.s lamented that AK had not yet addressed immunity, which they insist should be AK's first priority before undertaking more changes to the constitution.

-- Both claimed that one of CHP's objections is that AK does not share enough information with the opposition (note: a charge CHP also leveled at AK during the run-up to the negative 1 March vote on deployment of U.S. troops. End note). Yildirim, a garlic grower from Kastamonu province with ties to Baykal going back two decades, averred that CHP never knows what AKP will try to include in the reform packages. As an example, Yildirim pointed to AK's apparent desire to increase by several thousand the number of employees at the Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet -- septel).

Comment

16. (C) In citing the importance of implementation of existing reforms, Baykal makes an important point. However, whether this objection and CHP's attempt to force AK to amend the constitution to lift parliamentary immunity legitimize CHP's policy of legislative delay are another matter. On the reform issue, CHP is caught in a bind. On the one hand, it wants EU membership and therefore must be careful not to be seen as opposing Turkey's EU drive. On the other hand, CHP -- already gearing up for local elections, which must be held by April 2004 -- wants to prevent AK from taking too much credit. Moreover, the party is: 1) highly sensitive to arguments espoused in military and other Establishment circles about the potential danger to the status quo presented by EU-related reforms; and 2) temperamentally ill-suited to getting ahead of the rest of the Establishment on such issues. As always, CHP will listen intently for cues from such circles while formulating its approach.

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